

## Members of parliament surprised each other and voters

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On July 8, 1998, the two-month process of bargaining for the right to chair parliamentary sessions, push some bills and block other, give the floor to MPs and ignore the agenda, receive ample media coverage and a good deal of criticism for blunders made by the legislative branch was finalized by the election of Oleksandr Tkachenko by the vote 231 to 37, with 314 out of 441 MPs taking part in the voting and 45 ballots cast recognized as invalid. He was nominated to run from the "Left Center" faction by leader of the Peasants' party Serhiy Dovhan, and supported by Socialists (35 votes), Communists (121 votes) and Progressive Socialists (16 votes). The rest of the votes came from some of the independent MPs and the Hromada, as well as from some Social Democrats and the Greens. The support given to the left candidate by the Social Democratic and the Green factions finalized the split-up of the "right-wing bloc" of four factions (with the factions of the People's Democratic party and the Rukh).

At the session of factions immediately after the election of the Speaker, Oleksandr Tkachenko proposed to elect second secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist party Adam Martyniuk, and president of the Association of Ukrainian Attorneys, deputy chairman of the Social-Democratic party of Ukraine (United) Victor Medvedchuk as First Vice Speaker and Vice Speaker, respectively. Exhausted by 20 rounds of elections of the parliamentary chairman, MPs did not object to the nominations.

### Winners

Oleksandr Tkachenko's career is that of a typical Soviet-time apparatchik. He started as a metalworker in his native town, Shpola, in the Cherkasy region in mid-1950s, graduated from a local Institute of Agriculture in mid-1960s, shortly left his job as an agronomist to become first secretary of the local committee of the Young Communist League, Comsomol. In 1970 he was promoted to the positions of head of organizational department, secretary, then first secretary of the Tarashcha Communist party district committee, raikom. In 1981, after attending a course at the Higher Party School of the CPU Central Committee, he became an inspector of the CPU Central Committee. Four years later he was promoted to the position of the Minister of Agriculture of the Soviet Ukraine and first deputy head of the State Agro-Industrial Committee of the Ukrainian SSR. In July 1990, he was appointed to the position of first Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR, and in May 1991 he became the State Minister for Agrarian Policy and Food Supplies - Minister of Agriculture of the Ukrainian SSR. Tkachenko ran for presidency in 1991 as a candidate supported by the Socialist Party of Ukraine, but withdrew from the race shortly before the polling day and urged his supporters to vote for Leonid Kravchuk. In the Soviet era, he was decorated with a number of high awards, including the title of the Hero of Socialist Labor, orders "Badge of Honor", of the Red banner of Labor, of Lenin, and of the October Revolution. Oleksandr Tkachenko was elected to the 13th parliament of Ukraine in the runoff in April 1994 in a constituency of his native town Shpola. At the time of election he was the president of the Agro- industrial Association "Zemlya i Liudy" ("Land and People") and a leader of the Peasants' party. The victory was not a hard thing: the strongest of his three competitors was a dean of a Kyiv-based church.

In his 1994 campaign message, he defined his political perspectives and goals as "radical change of the country's economic and political course towards social reorientation of the economy, overcoming the crisis by means of denationalization and people's privatization..., priority of agriculture and food-processing industry". His other pledges included giving peasants the right to use land parcels for indefinite periods of time and to sell their parcels "within their collectives", state subsidies to agriculture, comprehensive state protectionism that would involve "guaranteed supply of fuel, equipment, chemicals, construction materials and other resources." Other vows differed little from the usual set of promises to "protect" and "ensure" social justice. Nevertheless, Tkachenko is aware of benefits that may be gained from market economy: he was among the first recipients of multimillion foreign loans.

His relations with the executive branch have always been rather even. In December 1995, Prime Minister Yevhen Marchuk signed a resolution on including Tkachenko to the list of state experts for state secrets who were eligible for receiving special bonuses to their salaries. In November 1996, Oleksandr Tkachenko was approved by President Kuchma as a member of the commission established "to ensure timely start of operation of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine". In November 1997, Tkachenko was appointed to by Prime Minister Valery Pustovoitenko to the State Commission for Organization of Agrarian Stock Exchange. His other duties included supervision of implementation of the parliamentary resolution "On the Status of Safety and Prospects For Development of Nuclear Energy in Ukraine and the Problem of Closing Down the Chornobyl NPP" (April 1997) and the resolution "On Considering the Constitution of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea" (December 1997)

Informally, he is reported to be one of the most wealthy members of the legislature and can hardly boast an impeccable reputation: in 1993, the "Land and People" Association chaired by Oleksandr Tkachenko received a US\$ 70 million American loan, secured with the state guarantees, to purchase equipment and seeds and attract expertise in growing corn. The association's failure to demonstrate positive results in a due time was followed by accusations of deliberate misappropriation of funds. However, charges against him were not legally proven. According to Oleksandr Tkachenko's income tax return, his annual income in 1997 totalled 12,160.11 UAH (about US\$6,080), including 10,007.36 UAH of his salary as an MP.

Newly-elected First Vice Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada, hard-line Communist Adam Martyniuk is second secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist party of Ukraine (CPU) and editor-in-chief of the party's newspaper, the *Komunist*. Although being the Communist party' "minister of ideology", "minister of information" and often a "minister of foreign affairs" in relations with Russian comrades, he has kept remarkably low-profile. According to Martyniuk, by electing the left-wing Speaker Communists "fulfilled their program minimum" and demonstrated a "victory over the ruling party".

Vice Speaker Victor Medvedchuk, president of the Association of Ukrainian Attorneys, member of the High Council of Justice of Ukraine, deputy chairman of the Social-Democratic party of Ukraine (United), is the only person in the new leadership of the Ukrainian parliament who can be expected to pursue democratic and economic reforms. In March 1998, he received one of the most convincing victories (90.17% of the votes cast in his constituency) for the second time, after winning the seat in the same constituency in a by-election in 1997. In the traditionally nationalist Transcarpathian region, he won without common warnings of a "Russian threat" or "Communist takeover"; instead, he offered support for transforming the region into an area of implementation of advanced economic and environmental programs. After becoming an MP, he used the funds of his financial structures to establish a charity fund to bring gas to local villages, repair roads, supply medicine to local hospitals and pay small allowances to war veterans and Chornobyl victims. His most significant initiatives in the region include the establishment of the Center for Development of the Transcarpathia, cofounded by the Ukrainian Industrial-Financial Corporation Slavutych, the Ukrainian Credit Bank and the Dynamo-Kyiv football club. In five months, the Center attracted US\$ 4.1 million foreign investment in the area, one third of the total investments received by the region in 1997.

Although stressing his affiliation with an oppositional party, Victor Medvedchuk has occupied a number of important positions in the executive branch. In 1995, he was appointed to the position of a member of the Council of Employers under the President of Ukraine. In October 1996, he became a free-lance adviser on issues of taxation policy to the President of Ukraine and in July 1997, he became a member of the presidential Supreme Economic Council and a member of the State Commission for Administrative Reform. Since October 1997 he has been a member of the President's Coordination Council for Legal and Judiciary Reform.

In 1997, Medvedchuk signed a joint statement of the Association of Attorneys and Association of Lawyers arguing there were no grounds for initiating the procedure of impeaching the President, demanded by the parliamentary committee chaired by Volodymyr Stretovych.

#### Losers

Oleksandr Moroz. After Tkachenko's victory, he emotionally told the press that the whole two-month-long series of efforts had been made exclusively to prevent him from becoming the Speaker again. Following the loss of a chance to occupy the high-profile and influential position of the parliamentary

leader, Moroz may face the breakup of the Socialist-Peasant coalition which, according to Tkachenko, had been "formed as a pre-election bloc". Pavlo Lazarenko. He was not present at the session when a number of members of his Hromada faction supported Tkachenko. Now, his failure to pull "his own" candidate to the Speaker's seat or become the Speaker himself will cost Lazarenko substantial influence on the parliament.

The People's Democratic Party. Members of the PDP faction are divided in their comments about Tkachenko's victory. According to Oleksandr Danylchuk, until recently president of the Ukgazservice company and not a member of the PDP, the party supported the candidate "to a certain extent". The most important thing is that Oleksandr Tkachenko "is not afraid of business" and, therefore is "a person of compromise" who "does not represent a threat to the financial structures backing each of the parliamentary factions". The statement of the recently converted businessman appears to reflect the reasoning of non- left MPs who voted for Tkachenko. Meanwhile, a convinced People's Democrat Oleksandr Yemets told the press that both the PDP and the Rukh had "voted towards zero" and not a single PDP vote had been cast. He argued they intended "to talk to representatives of the SDPU and the Greens" and referred to the offer of collaboration made by Oleksandr Moroz in exchange for making a representative of the PDP the first vice speaker. Whatever the truth is, the PDP's failure is likely to cost the faction a number of its nonpartisan members who may switch to other factions.

Natalia Vitrenko and her Progressive Socialists. Instead of demonstrating any gratitude to the faction's members, who were unanimous and vocal in their support for Tkachenko, he proposed to return to the 25-member quota for factions. If restored, the quota will destroy the 16-strong Progressive Socialist faction and threaten the 24-member Green faction.

#### New Speaker and the Executive Branch

According to observers, the only person who can be absolutely happy with having Tkachenko as Speaker is President Leonid Kuchma: firstly, because not of his likely rivals in the forthcoming presidential race (primarily, Oleksandr Moroz, Pavlo Lazarenko and Yevhen Marchuk) got the seat, and secondly, because now he can blame the "left-dominated" parliament for problems that may undermine his recent economic reform initiatives. Referring to his 1991 experience, Tkachenko announced he did not intend to run for presidency again. As a typical apparatchik and not a public politician, lacking any trace of an image of a charismatic leader and so far demonstrating no desire to become one, Oleksandr Tkachenko has never been a competitor to the President. Unlike his more ideology-concerned allies from the Socialist and Communist camp, Tkachenko is yet another "manager" (after Pavlo Lazarenko). In fact, the two men are very much alike: both come from the agrarian sector, both are reasonably pro-market and reasonably left to the extent that is necessary for advancing their own interests, both have solid financial backing. Due to these reasons, it is likely that the collision of interests may cause severe confrontation between them and undermine Lazarenko's influence in the parliament - the very thing the President sought to achieve.

Another winner - at least for the near future - is Prime Minister Valery Pustovoitenko. The new Speaker explicitly stated he did not intend to insist on changing the government - which should resign to the new parliament according to the Constitution - and agreed to the government's proposals about amending the 1998 budget so that to reduce the budget deficit to the limits required by the IMF as a condition to the IMF loans. In a very timely coincidence: a few days before the election of Tkachenko as the Speaker, Prime Minister Valery Pustovoitenko agreed to the proposal of the Ministry of the Agro-Industrial Complex and signed a resolution about clearing all debts of agrarian enterprises (former collective and state farms) to the "Zemlya i Liudy" Association in exchange for writing-off part of the association's debt to the state.

Shortly after his election, the new Speaker surprised his colleagues and observers by announcing the possibility of forming a parliamentary majority on the basis of three major factions: Communists, the Socialist-Peasant bloc and the pro-presidential People's Democratic party. He also mentioned "negotiations" with the Social Democrats. According to Tkachenko, both the PDP and the SDPU factions "are close to us because they are left- centrist".

Other initiatives of the new Speaker that may worry the executive branch include the intention to insist on making amendments to the Constitution so that to give the parliament the right to approve the appointment and dismissal of "power ministers" (i.e., ministers of defence and internal affairs, and head

of the Security Service) and vice prime ministers in addition to nominees for positions of Prime Minister and Attorney General. Meanwhile, he spoke against proposed amendments to the Constitution that would limit the President's powers. Tkachenko dismisses the idea of selling and buying land as an "anti-popular phenomenon" and borrowing from foreign financial sources as "shameful living in debt", while advocating "pro- Russian, instead of pro-Western way of development" and inclusion of Ukraine to the CIS Customs Union. As arguments in favor of this position, he quotes long economic integration of Ukraine and Russia, "similar mentality, personnel and scientific potential" and his good personal relations with Russian legislature's left- wing leaders Gennadiy Seleznirov and Yegor Stroyev.

While politicians and observers may try to predict the new Speaker's policy and exercise their sense of humor on Oleksandr Tkachenko's statements (he has got a reputation for his awkward language) Oleksandr Tkachenko may prove to be a player far more independent and unpredictable than the boldest forecasts suggest.